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[Open letter to Jason Russell CEO of Invisible Children Inc on KONY2012](#)

Sunday, 11 March 2012 23:59

By Amber Ha



Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey and Laren Poole, pose with SPLA soldiers

Dear Jason Russell,

After being bombarded with your KONY 2012 crusade, I have no choice but to respond to your highly inaccurate, offensive, and harmful propaganda. I realized I had to respond in hopes of stopping you before you cause more violence and deaths to the Acholi people (Northern Ugandans), the very people you are claiming to protect.

Firstly, I would like to question your timing of this KONY 2012 crusade in Uganda when most of the violence from Joseph Kony and the LRA (The Lord's Resistance Army)

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has subsided in Uganda in the past 5 years. The LRA has moved onto neighboring countries like the DRC and Sudan. Why are you not urging action in the countries he is currently in? Why are you worried about Kony all of a sudden when Ugandans are not at this present moment?

This grossly illogical timing and statements on your website such as "Click here to buy your KONY 2012 products" makes me believe that the timing has more to do with your commercial interests than humanitarian interests. With the upcoming U.S. presidential elections and the waning interest in Invisible Children, it seems to be perfect timing to start a crusade. I also must add at this point how much it personally disgusts me the way in which you have commercialized a conflict in which thousands of people have died.

Secondly, I would like to address the highly inaccurate content of your video. Your video did not leave the viewer any more knowledgeable about the conflict in Uganda, but only emotionally assaulted. I could not help but notice how conveniently one-sided the "explanation" in your video was. There was absolutely no mention of the role of the Ugandan government and military in the conflict. Let alone the role of the U.S. government and military. The only information given is "KONY MUST BE STOPPED."

I would like to inform you that stopping Kony would not end the conflict. (It is correctly pronounced "Kohn" by the way). This conflict is deeply embedded in Uganda's history that neither starts nor ends with Kony. Therefore, your solution to the problem is flawed. There is no way to know the solution, without full knowledge of the problem itself. We must act on knowledge, not emotions.

Joseph Kony formed the LRA in retaliation to the brutality of President Museveni (from the south) committing mass atrocities on the Acholi people (from the north) when President Museveni came to power in 1986. This follows a long history of Ugandan politics that can be traced back to pre-colonial times. The conflict must be contextualized within this history. (If you want to have this proper knowledge, I suggest you start by working with scholars, not celebrities). President Museveni is still in power and in his reign of 26 years he has arguably killed as many, if not more Acholi people, than Joseph Kony. Why is President Museveni not demonized, let alone mentioned? I would like to give you more credit than just ignorance. I have three guesses. One is that Invisible Children has close ties with the Ugandan government and military, which it has been accused of many times. Second, is that you are willing to fight Kony, but not the U.S. Government, which openly supports President Museveni. Third, is that Invisible Children feels the need to reduce the conflict to better commercialize it.

This brings me to my third issue, the highly offensive nature of your video. Firstly, it is offensive to your viewer. The scene with your "explanation" of the conflict to your toddler son suggests that the viewers have the mental capacity of a toddler and can only handle information given in such a reductionist manner. I would like to think American teenagers and young adults (which is clearly your target audience) are smarter than your toddler son. I would hope that we are able to realize that it is not a "Star Wars" game with aliens and robots in some far off galaxy as your son suggests, but a real world conflict with real world people in Uganda. This is a real life conflict with real life consequences.

Secondly, and more importantly, it is offensive to Ugandans. The very name "Invisible Children" is offensive. You claim you make the invisible, visible. The statements, "We have seen these kids." and "No one knew about these kids." are part of your slogan. You seem to be strongly hinting that you somehow have validated and found these kids and their struggles.

Whether you see them or not, they were always there. Your having seen the kids does not validate their existence in any shape or form or bring it any more significance. You say "no one" knew about the kids. What about the kids themselves? What about the families of the kids who were killed and abducted? Are they "no one?" Are they not human?

These children are not invisible; you are making them invisible by silencing, dehumanizing, marketing, and invalidating them.

Last year I went to Gulu, Uganda, where Invisible Children is based, and interviewed over 50 locals. Every single person questioned Invisible Children's legitimacy and intention. Every single person. If anything, it seemed the people saw Invisible Children as a bigger threat than Joseph Kony at the time. Why is it the very people you are trying to "help" feel more offense than relief with your aid?

"They come here to make money and use us."

"It makes us feel terrible to be presented as being so stupid and helpless."

These are direct quotes. This was the sentiment of the majority of the people that I interviewed in varying degrees. I definitely didn't see or hear these voices or opinions in your video. If you are to be "saving" the Acholi people, the very least you can be doing is holding yourself accountable to them and actually listening to what they have to say.

This offensive, inaccurate misconstruction of Ugandans and its conflict makes me wonder what and whom this is really about. It seems that you feel very good about yourself being a savior, a Luke Skywalker of sorts, and same with the girl in your video who passionately states, "This is what defines us". Therefore, I can't help but wonder if Invisible Children is more about defining the American do-gooders (and making them feel good), rather than the Ugandans; profiteering the American military and corporations (which Invisible Children is officially and legally) than the conflict.

Lastly, I would like to address the harmful nature of your propoganda. I believe your actions will actually bring back the fighting in Northern Uganda. You are not asking for peace, but violence. The fighting has stopped in the past 5 years and the Acholi are finally enjoying some peace. You will be inviting the LRA and the fighting back into Uganda and disturbing this peace. The last time Invisible Children got politically involved and began lobbying it actually caused more violence and deaths. I beg you not to do it again.

If you open your eyes and see the actions of the Ugandan government and the U.S. government, you will see why. Why is it that suddenly in October of 2011 when there has been relative peace in Uganda for 4 years, President Obama decided to send troops into Uganda? Why is it that the U.S. military is so involved with AFRICOM, which has been pervading African countries, including Uganda? Why is it that U.S. has been traced to creating the very weapons that has been used in the violence? The U.S. is entering Uganda and other countries in Africa not to stop violence, but to create a new battlefield.

In your video you urge that the first course of action is that the Ugandan military needs American military and weapons. You are giving weapons to the very people who were killing the Acholi people in the first place. You are helping to open the grounds for America to make Uganda into a battlefield in which it can profit and gain power. Please recognize this is all part of a bigger military movement, not a humanitarian movement. This will cause deaths, not save lives. This will be doing more harm, than good.

You end your video with saying, "I will stop at nothing". If nothing else, will you not stop for the lives of the Acholi people? Haven't enough Acholi people suffered in the violence between the LRA and the Ugandan government? Our alliance should not be with the U.S. government or the Ugandan military or the LRA, but the Acholi people. There is a Ugandan saying that goes, "The grass will always suffer when two elephants fight." Isn't it time we let the grass grow?

Amber runs a travel blog called Pieces of Me, please visit: <http://pomee.tumblr.com>



Comments (135)

500 characters remaining

Okello 6 days ago
If I can know what the angels sings, how they sing, Praise the lord

Always the same thing 6 days ago
Sorry for the same comment, my internet was trippin'. I guess it kept refreshing the site when I posted this comment

Always the same thing 6 days ago
Why did the U.S. invade Iraq? To stop Saddam Hussein. Why did the U.S. invade Libië? To stop Khaddafi. Why does the U.S. want to invade Uganda? To stop Joseph Kony. What do these countries have in common? They all have OIL! Wake up people. Watch the movie of KONY 2012 and listen very carefully @ 13:50. They would never get involved in a war, unless their financial interest are at stake. The U.S. is searching a new country where they can get oil. Uganda has oil.

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The Rationalist 7 days ago

Bravo!!! It us very important to be duly aware of all sides of the story and not be led purely by emotion, that is what leads to mobs.

C 7 days ago

This is native and ignorant. What are you doing to help the world? Stop attacking ppl who actually have passion.

Kony 2012 helps 7 days ago

There is a judgement that could be said of most charities and how they deal with money an how they use media to fund their perjects. Although this is not good/unhelpful we all give...I find it almost funny that you are says ...do nothing!

Publius Q. Public 8 days ago

It's all a plot to secure Uganda's oil for the US. Why else would the government get involved now? Iraq is a done deal, so we need to create a humanitarian "tragedy" - manufacture it - in order to get our hands on more oil and control more people. You realize something is going on here. That's a good sign.

Publius Q. Public 8 days ago -2

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La voix de l'Afrique 9 days ago

If u never been to Africa please just shut the f***k up..history shows us that every time white people got involved with African problem more people end up being dead..e.g. Genocide in Rwanda. I've been to Uganda and trust me people are doing okay for an African country,so don't take this away with your non-sense stories...if u want help people in Africa, there are countries like Somalia and Sudan that are actually fighting right now..if u want help send money to help feed people here.

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Leon Pinell 9 days ago

Excellent article. I am a Canadian but have had the opportunity to study the Ugandan situation, especially noting the ongoing barbarity and complicity of Museveni, coupled with his long alliance with the U.S. government. In watching the KONY 2012, this mainly fictional and misleading video, I recognized many of the points that you made so very clearly. I hope this article gets wide attention. Thank you for writing it.

D Mc 9 days ago

What a shame that so many people are dismissing this article. This is very well thought out and informative. So many stupid close minded people have written below. This is obviously a revenue campaign, and everyone is rallying blindly behind it. America is going to gain money from weapon sales & war, as they have done nearly every decade. After so many wars in the last 60 years, how can they justify another one and still look good? Get everyone to rally for you. Good job, ignorant fools.

Rieko Ber Acholi 10 days ago

Acholi Must re-think!!, "I asked". Acel Dwong

Rieko Ber Acholi 10 days ago

Acholi Must re-think!!, "I asked". Acel Dwong

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